CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Sarah Grogan (1999) in her book "Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children" defines *body image* as "A person's perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body" (1999: 1). The ideal body figure, according to Grogan (1999) is not static but fluid as it evolves according to time and culture. She points out that in the 1800s, the idealized female form was voluptuous and plump. The notion that women must have slim figures in order to be considered as having the ideal figure is a very recent phenomenon which dated from the 1920s (Gordon 1990 cited in Grogan, 1999). Grogan (1999) states that after the First World War, the "Flapper" fashion which popularized the boy-like, "flat-chested" figure became popular. In the 1960s, the trend for slimness became very intense when fashion model Twiggy became the role model for many young women (Freedman 1986 cited in Grogan, 1999). During this period, having a slim body became a symbol of freedom and youthfulness (Orbach 1993 cited in Grogan, 1999).

In recent decades, women are still continuously being bombarded with images of ideal beauty from the Western world. Sloan (2007) points out that in the late 20th century, there has been an increased emphasis on thinness as the beauty ideal for women. According to her, our body image is largely shaped by the ideas of what is desirable and attractive in the culture that we live in. She believes that the ideal beauty standards for today's women are largely impacted by the mass media and contemporary fashion trend.

Today, young and slim female artistes from Hollywood are often regarded as the benchmark of beauty. The advancement of the multimedia industry has enabled the Western patriarchal beauty standard to be transmitted to other parts of the world in an increasingly efficient manner either through the silver screens or the advertisements. In order to sell their products, slimming centres in Malaysia construct the ideal body shape as a commodity that can be purchased by every woman regardless of age or marital status. The mushrooming of the local and franchise slimming centres in Malaysia is an indicator that the 'marketization' of the ideal body image has gained its foothold in the minds of Malaysian women. By browsing through the local newspapers and women's magazines, one will see the numerous slimming advertisements that often promote the ideal body image as the prerequisite for every woman.

In this study, the researcher intends to identify the words used by the print advertisements (sponsored by slimming centres) to construct the ideal body image for women in Malaysia. Grogan (1999) stresses that body image is socially constructed and therefore needs to be examined within its social cultural context. The social practice of the Malaysian society will also be examined to determine its influence in the construction of the ideal body image for the Malaysian women.

1.1 Advertising Discourse

Marcel Danesi (1999) states that the term 'advertising' is derived from the medieval Latin verb *advertere* which means "to direct one's attention to". He believes that in today's consumerist societies, advertising has become a privileged discourse that has more rhetorical force than other traditional form of rhetorical discourses. Advertising exalts and instills lifestyle values by capitalizing on hidden fears such as fears of loss of social standing, unattractiveness and so on (Danesi 1999: 183). Danesi (1999) claims that throughout the 20th century, advertising has been propagating consumerism as a way of life that can provide solutions to virtually all psychological and social problems. According to Williamson (1978) advertising gives us false fulfillment in exchange of our real needs and desires. It makes people feel discontented or lacking in something and encourages them to consume the advertised product in order to fill the gap.

Angela Goddard (1998) in her book "The Language of Advertising" disagrees with the view that advertising language is a commonplace discourse written for the uneducated. She argues that if that is the case then product manufacturers would not have invested huge sums of money to advertise their products. Goddard (1998) asserts that although advertisements are short-lived, they leave behind longstanding and cumulative effects to form a body of messages about the culture that produced them and

> "These messages can then function to reflect and to construct cultural values: they can reflect the values of the powerful groups in society who produced the texts, but the reflection itself can then harden to become the touchstone for everyone."

(Goddard 1998: 3)

1.2 Advertisements and Ideology

Judith Williamson (1978) believes that ideology reproduces itself in advertisements and it works very subtly and always catches people unaware. According to her, ideology is often not being questioned because we consider them as 'truth'. Williamson (1978) strongly believes that ideologies cannot be known and undone because they are incorporated into advertisements in a very fast rate through a very subtle approach.

Fairclough defines 'ideology' as "propositions (or implicit assumptions in texts) that … contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination" (1995b: 14). Fairclough believes that ideologies operate through powerful 'ideological state apparatuses' such as the mass media, education and popular culture (Fairclough 2006a: 87). Fairclough (2006a), states that "The ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of *common sense*" (Fairclough 2006a: 87). This is where Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can prove to be a useful tool to demonstrate that discourse is both socially constitutive and constituted by the social (Fairclough 2006a: 64).

Andrew Wernick (1991) states that at the social level, 'ideology' can be defined as "symbols and cosmologies, values, norms and ideals, plus the systems and partial system into which these are culturally arranged" (Wernick 1991: 23). He asserts that advertising maintains the capitalist order by providing the "captains of industry with the ideal propaganda vehicle" to promote and propagate ideological values. The first function of advertising, according to Wernick (1991) is to promote something in order to sell. In the midst of the process of promoting, advertising engages itself with the values, norms, goals and dreams of the addressee. In this respect, Wernick (1991)

firmly believes that all advertising is ‘an ideological vehicle’ including those that are most rational and loaded with solid information (Wernick 1991: 46). This is because he suggests that all advertising looks at the addressees as consumers and aims to influence them into purchasing the products advertised. Wernick (1991) adds that advertising makes use of the intended symbolic meaning of the products and attributed needs, desires and values that the meaning defines. He argues that advertising brings people the culture and values that belong to them.

However, it may not always be the case that advertising draws on the existing value in a culture at all times. This is because new values that have been introduced by advertising will be internalized by the society and accepted as their own over a period of time. Therefore, when advertising continues to employ these sets of internalized values, it may seem that it is employing the existing cultural values of the society. The truth is, these values have been ‘naturalized’ (to borrow the term coined by Fairclough, 2006a).

1.3 Patriarchal Culture - The "Male Gaze"

"In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (Bartky 2003 cited in Pienaar 2006:23). John Berger et. al. (1975) in "Ways of Seeing", states that "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. …. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger et. al. 1975: 47).

Noami Wolf (2002) is perhaps one of the most renowned feminist writers who wrote about women and their struggles with the issue of beauty. In her book entitled "The Beauty Myth: How images of beauty are used against women", Wolf (2002) points out that "the beauty myth" is the best belief system that preserves male dominance in the West" (Wolf 2002: 12) and it will remain as long as there has been patriarchy.

Advertisement is a site that is highly saturated with the discourse of patriarchy (Kwan, 2004; Albani, 2005). Kwan (2004) points out that advertisements convey the message that femininity can be achieved by pursing a perfect body according to today's definition i.e. a slim body with a good sized breast and buttock. Similarly, Albani (2005) points out that magazine advertising constructs woman's ideal body shape according to the dominant patriarchal beauty standards in the society. She (2005) believes that "by looking at fashion advertisements, women internalize male ways of seeing female bodies and identify with the male gaze" (Albani 2005: 38). Jeffries (2007) also highlights that the data in her study repeatedly imply that it is important for women not to be overweight so that they can appear sexually attractive to men. In another

study, de Felippe Bohlke (2008) states that the television advertisement for a weight management drug conveys the message that the female body has to follow certain correct practices of self-control in order to be desirable by men. She found that the verbal information in the advertisements is based on the assumption that losing weight would improve various aspects of a woman's life such as well-being, self-esteem and romance. According to her, the advertisements textually depict a thin body as one of the important factors that will lead a woman to romantic love.

In the present study, having an ideal body shape is constructed as a quality that is desired by men. The use of lexical items in the slimming advertisements such as sex appeal, seductive body and hot sexy contour imply that women's body are meant for the male gaze.

Due to the constant exposure to the media messages that are heavily saturated with patriarchal ideology on the ideal female body, women unconsciously internalized and naturalized the ideology until it is deemed as a natural common sense (Hammond, 1996; Kwan, 2004; Jeffries, 2007). Jeffries (2007) points out that these ideologies are capable of manipulating and influencing readers in specific manners either consciously or otherwise. Jeffries (2007) further stresses that women and girls are vulnerable to the messages in the mainstream magazines because they may not be able to consistently and fully resist the messages that contain ideology of the parties who have the power to dictate what is acceptable, normal, ideal, and so forth. Jeffries (2007) highlights that the impression that one gets when browsing through the pages of women magazines is the construction of the female body as a problem. She highlights that even pregnancy texts that are supposed to celebrate the normal function of the female body also contain the "mainstream ideology of the problematic body" (Jeffries 2007: 18). She (2007) argues

that women are “in a relatively weak position in relation to producers of the various ideologically-laden messages about the female body” (Jeffries 2007: 4) because such ideologies are delivered by the media that is obviously powerful; the messages are often naturalized and impossible for women not to consider them as absolute truth.

As a result of internalizing the dominant patriarchal discourse in the advertisements, women see their bodies as imperfect and strive to discipline themselves painstakingly to achieve the ideal flawless body (Kwan, 2004; Hammond, 1996; Albani, 2005). Albani (2005) believes that print advertisements that feature only body parts encourage women to view their bodies as ‘things’ that need moulding and shaping in order to conform to the male notion of female perfection.

From an in-depth interviews conducted with female students, working women and housewives, Ng (2005) gathers that students pursue the dominant ideals promoted by the slimming advertisements very closely, even at the expense of their health in order to be trendy and attract a male partner. On the extreme note, some women even resort to surgical procedures such as face lift, liposuction and tummy tucks to modify their bodies to meet the “male expectations” (Gallagher and Hébert, 2007). de Felippe Bohlke (2008) believes that media and the industry of body alteration, driven by economic interest, create, maintain and sustain the ideological messages that feminine identity is attained through consumption. She argues that advertising has the power to persuade and manipulate verbal and visual resources where dominant ideologies are portrayed as natural common sense to sustain the unequal power relations.

1.4 Association of Values to Body Types

Previous studies demonstrate that there are certain qualities that are being associated with specific body types or appearance. The findings of Jaya Ranee's (2002) study reveal that advertisements convey the message that having a slim body is the salient factor to be regarded as beautiful. Jaya Ranee (2002) points out that the messages communicated by the advertisement are biased and perceived women as objects of beauty. This is because from the analysis of the slimming advertisements, the message conveyed is that when a woman becomes slim, she is regarded as having gained her self-confidence. Conversely, her findings demonstrate that a fat and overweight woman is regarded as having an undesirable quality and thus lacks self-confidence.

Another pattern that is frequently repeated in slimming texts as pointed out by Jeffries (2007) is the tendency to equate the slimming achievement with happiness and success. Similarly, findings in the present study demonstrate that having a slim body is associated with many positive attributes such as beauty, sex appeal, self-confidence, success, health, happiness and sense of pride.

Tiggemann (2002) argues that the thin ideals are not presented by the media in a void but as part of what she called as "complex cultural scripts" whereby thinness and attractiveness are directly associated with happiness, desirability and status. She argues that by accepting this "cultural schema" that thinness is an important factor for success and happiness, a woman's sense of worth becomes comparable with her self-perceived outward appearance. As a result, appearance becomes an important ingredient to measure a woman's self-worth. She points out that such equation will result in body

dissatisfaction, negative mood and eating disorder in female adult and girls as young as 8 years old.

From the data analysis, Jeffries (2007) highlights that there is a widespread assumption that women are generally overweight and being overweight is seen as a problem. Jeffries (2007) asserts that the high frequency of superlatives employed to describe weight loss imply that weight loss is one of the key indicators for success. Weight loss is also implied as having the ability to solve all other difficult problems in life. This finding is similar with that of the present study. In the present study, “problem” is a lexical item that is widely used in the slimming advertisements to depict the overweight body. Similarly, body parts with more fat concentration are described as problematic areas that are undesirable.

Similar to the texts analyzed by Jeffries (2007), Gallagher and Hébert (2007) also note that the participants of the makeover programmes often paint the picture that as a result of undergoing plastic surgery, the quality of their lives becomes better and all their problems are solved.

1.5 Statement of Problem

A search in the literature reveals that there has been very little research that employs the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explain how the image of women is linguistically constructed in advertisements. The present study intends to address the research gap by examining in particular the words that the advertisers use in order to construct the ideal body image for women in Malaysia.

It is also noted that most past researches also do not examine the reason behind the ideology of slimness in a text. By using a CDA theoretical framework (Fairclough, 1995a) to analyze the lexical items in the promotional texts, the present study aims to unearth the dominant ideology that is being constructed by the slimming advertisements in the print media. At the same time, the discursive practice and the social practice of the Malaysian society will be examined to explain how the social practice of the Malaysian society influences the construction of an ideal woman's body image.

Over the years, there have been numerous studies conducted by scholars on the effects of mass media on women's body image (see e.g. Fang Wan, 2002; Tiggemann, 2002; Garner, 1997; Hesse-Biber et. al., 2006; Bolla, 2001). Women have been the target of the advertisements that encourage them to look in a particular way in order to be considered ideal. The female image in advertisements almost always fits a western beauty myth: thin, young, able-bodied and light-skinned (Albani, 2005).

According to Fang Wan (2002), mass media has been identified as a powerful social agent that conveys, encourages and shapes the cultural ideal of female slenderness. She points out that the content analyses of advertisements (Goffman, 1959)

and women's magazines (Ferguson, 1978) demonstrate that ideal women are being depicted as thin and sexy.

Tiggemann (2002) in her study on "Media Influences on Body Image Development" in *Body Image: a Handbook of Theory, Research and Clinical Practice* points out that media presentation of thin ideals is one of the main contributors to the present high levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders in women. She argues that formal content analyses of visual media such as magazines, film and television programmes demonstrate that the trend towards thinness is prevalent. Tiggemann (2002) asserts that when women are repeatedly exposed to the thin images in the media, they may internalize the thin ideal and treat the thin image as the yardstick to evaluate themselves.

Garner (1997), in a 1997 survey on 4,000 readers of the magazine *Psychology Today* reports that nearly half the women reveal that the extremely thin magazine models make them feel insecure and want to reduce weight. Hesse-Biber et. al. (2006) in their research entitled "The mass marketing of disordered eating and Eating Disorders: The social psychology of women, thinness and culture" point out that "The American culture sends a powerful signal to women – that only the beautiful and the thin are valued and loved" (Hesse-Biber et. al. 2006: 208).

A study on beauty and fashion magazines by Danielle Bolla (2001) demonstrates that such magazines often support social definitions of the meaning of being beautiful in the 21st century by offering readers the products as the means to realize the contemporary beauty ideals that advocate the idea that "thinner is better".

Therefore, Bolla (2001) points out that women may be defining themselves based on the beauty ideology that in actual fact is created out of the economic need of an industry.

The studies discussed above investigate the negative impact of advertisement on women. They focus on the analysis of the visual image (i.e. semiotic analysis) of advertisements. Hence, the present study will employ the CDA framework to bridge the research gap.

1.6 Purpose of Study

The aim of the present study is to identify the words that are drawn on by the advertisers to construct the ideal and non-ideal body image in selected slimming advertisements in Malaysia. It also aims to elucidate the opaque ideology on women's ideal body image.

It is hoped that this study will be able to create awareness among women regarding the portrayal of the ideal body image for women in the print advertisements sponsored by slimming centres. This study will also demonstrate to women that the ideal body image is merely a social construction that is not static but changing all the time according to the definition of what is considered as ideal by the dominant forces in the society.

In this study, the researcher aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

(a) What are the words used to describe the non-ideal female body and the ideal female body?

(b) What are the qualities and values associated with the ideal female body?

(c) How do the social practice and discursive practice influence text production and interpretation?

1.7 Significance of Study

Though there were many studies in the past that debated on the topic of women's body image, most of them focused on the effects of media portrayals (Mapgaonkar, 2005; Sung-Yeon Park, 2005). Moreover, majority of the studies (Albani, 2005; Mapgaonkar, 2005; Park, 2005; Mooney et. al., 2004) on media portrayal of the female body image focused on the visual images that appear in the advertisements without paying adequate attention to the lexical items. Those that examined the lexical choices of slimming advertisements (Ng, 2005; Jaya Ranee, 2002) do not employ CDA framework. In addition, these studies also do not examine the reasons behind the construction of such thin ideals. From a Critical Discourse analyst point of view, it is of great importance to analyze discourse in the cultural context of a particular society. This is because according to Fairclough (2003), discourse represents the process and structures of the material world.

The findings of this study will enrich the current CDA literature in the area of textual analysis on women's body image. Other CDA researchers can draw on the findings of this research and conduct similar studies in their own countries. In this way, they will be able to determine whether there are any significant similarities or

differences in the promotional texts on women regardless of geographical areas. CDA researchers who are interested to conduct textual analysis on slimming advertisements will benefit from this study. This is because they will be able to expand on the various lexical strategies (i.e. negative lexicalization, negative labeling, positive lexicalization and positive association) that have been revealed in the findings of this study.

The findings of this research will enable women to be more informed about the various lexical items employed by the slimming advertisements. When women are more informed, they will be empowered to read the promotional texts in the slimming advertisements in a different light. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help women to identify the element of power imbalance in the slimming advertisements' texts and resist the dominant ideology of the slim ideal. When women are able to see beyond the surface of these promotional texts, they will be free from the bondage of false truth constructed by the print media.

Through this study, it is hoped that women will be aware that the media is able to present versions of reality with regards to the ideal body image by employing carefully chosen words and phrases in the print advertisements. The findings of this study will enable women to see that there is a consumerist power behind the construction of the ideal body image for women. They will be able to discern that the advertisers construct their own versions of reality in order to fulfill their economic agenda i.e. to market the slimming services by their companies.

1.8 Scope and Limitations

This study will employ textual analysis to analyze print advertisements in the local English newspapers that feature services provided by slimming centres in Malaysia. The researcher will analyze the data based on Fairclough's three dimensional framework. Due to the absence of other triangulation methods e.g.: interview or questionnaire, the data analysis of this research may contain some potential biasness.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not analyze audience reception of the print advertisements. Therefore, the researcher is not able to say with certainty that the audience will interpret the promotional texts in the manner stated in the analysis chapter. However, based on the various research on media effects on women's body image (see e.g. Mapgaonkar, 2005; Sung-Yeon Park, 2005; Hesse-Biber et. al., 2006; Tiggemann, 2002), the researcher is confident that the promotional texts will leave some marks in the minds of the female readers who read such advertisements.